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SUBJECT: BELGIUM: CHARGE'S MEETING WITH MIN TRANSPORTATION  
ON POSSIBLE AIRPLANE SABOTAGE AT ZAVENTEM AIRPORT

Summary  
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¶1. (SBU) In a March 11 meeting with the Charge and embassy officials to brief the Embassy on a recent alleged case of sabotage of two airplanes at Brussels's Zaventem airport, the Belgian Minister of Transportation and senior Belgian civil air officials told the Charge that as far as they know two planes were damaged, probably by an employee or employees upset by planned layoffs at the private company that provides maintenance repair services to some airlines at Zaventem. A police inquiry is underway. Federal Aviation Authority (FAA) officials from Frankfurt, Germany visited the repair facility of Belgian company Sabena Technics on March 11, and were satisfied with the safety and security measures the Government of Belgium had put into place. Belgian transportation authorities, while notifying the Ministry of Interior's anti-terror unit of the incidents, have discounted the possibility that the sabotage was an act of terrorism. One remaining question is how long the company had 'sat' on the information before informing authorities, who made the matter public when a large investigation was being carried out. End summary.

¶2. (U) Charge and embassy officers were briefed by Transportation Secretary Etienne Schouppe (of the CS&V party) and his staff March 11 regarding possible sabotage of two aircraft at Sabena Technics during the past few weeks. Schouppe had insisted on personally participating in the debriefing, and was accompanied by Frank Durinckx, his director for Civil Aviation, his chief of staff Johan Decuyper and aviation expert Geoffray Robert.

¶3. (SBU) Durinckx said that the ministry had been informed on March 6 about 'unusual events on two aircraft' by Sabena Technics, a private company providing maintenance and repair services at Zaventem to a number of airlines and customers. Sabena Technics is currently being restructured (downsized), although no employees have been selected yet to be let go, and the Ministry suspects an embittered employee caused the damage. The two aircraft involved were a Boeing 737 of a European cargo carrier and a C-130 of the Belgian Air Force. In both cases, wiring had been cut in a very visible location: three cables on the B737, and 16 on the C-130. Company inspectors had discovered the sabotage, and promptly added increased checks, fences and a controlled entry point around each plane, and created lists of personnel working on the planes. Also, Sabena Technics also notified all airlines which had planes serviced for the past two months, Durinckx said.

¶4. (SBU) Schouppe said his office had asked Sabena Technics for proof of the extra checks and had immediately contacted the judicial police to start an investigation. The police were currently interviewing some 150 persons, and for that reason, Schouppe said, he had also informed the press on March 9, much to the dismay of Sabena Technics and the employees' union. Schouppe defended his decision to inform the press, since in the process of interviewing 150 people, a leak was bound to happen, he said.

¶5. (SBU) Embassy FAA representative told Schouppe and his staff that he had already contacted the Frankfurt FAA office earlier in the week about this incident. On March 11, Frankfurt FAA had already visited the Sabena Technics plant, one of over 600 FAA-certified repair stations located outside the United States. Embassy FAA representative said his FAA Frankfurt colleagues had been 'very impressed' with the recent security measures.

¶6. (SBU) Durinckx said that they had no indication that this was an act of terrorism, although his office had informed the anti-terror unit at the Ministry of Interior about these incidents. He and Schouppe were of the opinion that this was an act of one or more disgruntled employees. Minister Schouppe said that Sabena Technics personnel were shocked by the sabotage, and he thought that those employees who will keep their jobs will 'probably perform even better than before' as a result of it.

¶7. (SBU) Comment: Although Belgian authorities appear to have reacted promptly and also have tried to avoid any 'cover

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ups,' it is still unclear how long Sabena Technics has been sitting on this information. Durinckx indicated that a first act of cutting wires could have occurred as early as February 17, and the fact that Sabena Technics went back two months to warn all of its customers during that period may be an indication that the company did not inform the Minister right away. End Comment.

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